

*The Influence of CONVERSATION, with
the Regulation thereof :*

A
S E R M O N

Preached at

St CLEMENT DANE,

TO A

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY.

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The Influence of Conversation, with the Regulation thereof.

PROV. xiii. 20.

*He that walketh with wise Men shall be
wise; but a Companion of Fools shall be
destroyed.*

CONVERSATION has ever
justly been accounted a powerful
Instrument of Good or Evil; it has
had ever a mighty Influence on the
Conduct of Human Life; and the Vice or
Virtue of the World has ever, in a great Mea-
sure, been owing to it. The Regulation,
therefore, of it, did in all Ages demand the
utmost Prudence and Caution, but surely in
none more than in this of ours. Now, if ever,
it is necessary for us to exhort all that have a
Concern for their own Souls, to shun the
Way of the Sinner, and refrain their Feet
from the Path of the Wicked. Now, if ever,
it is necessary for us to exhort all that fear the
Lord, to unite and combine themselves for the
Defence of his Honour, for the Security of
their

their own Souls, and, if it be possible, for the giving a Check to Sin, and propagating Holiness, in this impious Generation. For now the Number and Confidence of Sinners increases daily; Atheism and Prophaneness spread like a Leprosy; there is nothing in Example, nothing in Discourse, that speaks us Christians; we seem to have quitted, not only the Morals, but the Principles of the Gospel, and have degenerated so far from the Modesty, Purity, Sanctity and Dignity of Christian Conversation, that the least Air of Seriousness and Gravity begins to look singular and unfashionable: So that, what is worst of all, whilst the Wicked publish their Sin as *Sodom*, and hide it not, Religion seems to want Assurance, to distrust its own Cause, and to be in a Manner out of Countenance every-where, but in the Closet and the Temple; and we are in Danger in a little while to see Men more ashamed of Virtue than of Vice. These are the Reflections which determine me to this Subject. There is nothing obscure in the Text; I am only to mind you, that Wisdom and Goodness, Folly and Sin, are Terms equivalent in the Language of the Scripture, and particularly of this Book of *Proverbs*: And that to make up the Antithesis or Opposition between the two Parts of this Verse entire and full, we must read it thus: *He that keeps company with the virtuous and good, will himself be virtuous and happy: but he that keeps company with the vicious, will be vicious and miserable.* The Text then contains these two Propositions:

I. That

- I. That Men generally become such as the Company they keep.
- II. That Happiness is the natural Result or Fruit of Holiness, and Misery of Sin.

I will therefore, 1. Insist on each of these Doctrines, and then give you two or three Rules for your due Conduct in Reference to Society.

First, That Men are generally such as their Acquaintance and Familiars are. This is Affirmed in my Text, no less with Reference to good than bad Company: There is one general and plain Reason for this; all Men are naturally Lovers of themselves, and therefore the most effectual Way of endearing and obliging one another is by mutual Respects and Compliances; no Man can make his Court more effectually to another, than by falling in with him in Opinion and Practice, approving his Judgment, and observing his Inclination; this is that which flatters our Self-love, the predominant Principle in our Natures; this is that which renders Society agreeable, and Friendship lasting; which is never to be hoped for, where Mens Principles and Humours are inconsistent and incompatible: Ere we can be pleased ourselves, or please others, we must be mutually fashioned and molded into an Agreement and Conformity of Principles and Morals, we must be acted and governed by the same Affections and Inclinations, and moved and led by the same Desires and Passions. This is so far the universal Sense of Mankind, that it

has escaped no body's Observation; all act and judge by this Rule; we estimate Men by the Intimacies they maintain; and he is thought to have forfeited all Pretension to good Sense or good Breeding, who does not stifle those Sentiments, and suppress those Inclinations, which are apt to shock the Company he is in, or give any Disturbance or Disgust to his Friends. From hence the Proposition laid down follows with undeniable Evidence, *That Men are generally such as their Companions are*: For that Society will soon be dissolved, where we reap no Satisfaction from it; and we can reap none where there is no Agreement in our Notions and Inclinations.

But that this Truth, which is of the highest Consequence, may be the more deeply imprinted, I will proceed to a more distinct and particular Illustration of it. And first, "of the Influence good Company has on us towards making us wise and good." There are two Things in wise Men which never fail to work upon their Friends and Acquaintances: First, Good Discourses; Secondly, Good Examples.

First then as to *good Discourse*; how manifest is the Tendency of this? what Light, what Strength, what Pleasure does it minister? how does it awaken the Conscience, and purify the Heart? how does it quicken us when we languish? how does it recal and reduce us when we begin to forget ourselves, and lay aside a wise Sobriety of Mind and holy Fear? how does it raise us when we sink and grovel, and how often does it kindle in us wise Desires and holy Purposes? Thus *Solomon* observes,
That

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That the Lips of the Wise disperse Knowledge, Prov. xv. 7. and the New Testament tells us, concerning this Kind of Discourse, that it *ministers Grace to the Hearer*; that it *edifies and builds us up in our Holy Faith*: And the Disciples, going to *Emmaus*, remark what Life and Spirit there was in the Conversation of our Lord: *Did not our Hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the Way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* Luke xxiv. 32. Now, though no Words can ever be impregnated with the same Force and Energy with which our Lord's were; yet certainly, when God and our great Mediator, when the Riches of Divine Grace, when Righteousness and Heaven are the Subjects of our Discourse; when our Language flows from the Heart, and is animated by a vital and experimental Sense of that we talk of; when it has all the Advantages which a true Friendship and known Integrity, and the most favourable Opportunities can give it: Such Discourse can never fail of moving and affecting us.

From Discourse I pass on to Example; and here it is certain, That Virtue never appears so beautiful and lovely as in Action: That it is represented with much more Life, in the Practice of a wise and good Man, than it can be in Rules and Precepts: That the Notions we form of Duty from the Lives of others, are generally more correct and just, than those which we form even from the Scriptures themselves; for we are apt to bend and accommodate the Rule a little in favour of ourselves, but we never do so in favour of others: That

the Excellencies and Perfections of a Friend are very strong Incitements to Emulation, and very sensible Reproofs of our Remissness and comparative Barrenness and Unprofitableness; and on the other Side, his Defects are excellent Lessons of Caution and Watchfulness: it is, lastly, certain, that whatever Beauty and Loveliness there be in Virtue, it receives a new Accession from the Example of my Friend, whose Integrity I know; and the Esteem and Affection I have for him, is apt to beget in me a Value for every thing he approves, and inclines me to be pleased with what he does. But these Arguments are too many and too copious to be dwelt on; I content myself therefore only to have mentioned them, and will lay before you but this one single Consideration: A good Life in a Companion is certainly a mighty Motive and Encouragement to us; for while we behold our Friends discharging the Parts of good *Christians*, we see in them not only what we ought to do, but what we may do. Whatever is possible to them, is possible to us too; for they are clad with the same Frailties and Passions, exposed to the same Temptations, and have no other Assistances than what we have, or may have. In them we have plain Demonstration of the Truth and Power of Religion; we can no longer imagine that Faith is a mere Speculation or Amusement, or Virtue a mere Pretence or Name; under these Convictions we shall either come to a Resolution ourselves to do our Duty, or shall suffer the daily Reproaches of our own Minds. This is the natural Influence of Example; It instructs,
it

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it Reproves, Exhorts, and, if it do not prevail, it Condemns. Thus St Paul, Heb. xii. 1. *Wherefore being compassed about with such a Cloud of Witnesses, let us lay aside every Weight, and the Sin that does so easily beset us: And let us run with Patience the Race that is set before us.* Where the Apostle plainly teaches us, that, if the Faith and Patience of Martyrs and Confessors do not move us to imitate their Virtues, they will certainly serve to upbraid and condemn us at the last Day; and certainly the Examples of the Living, and those of our Familiars and Friends, cannot but have as much Force and Power in them, as those of the Dead: Nay much more, for the Reasons I have already suggested. Will not our own Hearts be apt to reason thus with us, on every Reflection we make on the Virtues of our Friend? What am I doing? can he and I go to the same Place at last? he pursues a Crown by Works of Faith, and shall I obtain it by the Works of Darknes? he seeks a Heaven by the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope; and shall I gain it by Sloth and Idleness, by Sensuality and Looseness? he mortifies the Body while I indulge it? he prays and contends, and passes his Life in holy Fear, while I am careless and unconcerned about a future State. His Conduct is regular, his Discourse heavenly, the Bent of his Soul is toward that which is good; but how little do I mind these Things? how hard is it for me not to let him see that I am wholly set upon the Pleasures and Profits of this World? what do I mean? am I indeed in the right, and he in

the wrong? Is Religion indeed but a well-devised Fable? Alas! I see the contrary. I see that there is Truth and Reason on his Side; I cannot but reverence him, and think him happy; I cannot but own that he follows his Reason, I my Lust and Fancy. How uneasy these Kind of Soliloquies must be, and how naturally they will end, either in reforming our Follies, or in breaking off and quitting a Conversation which gives us so much Trouble, you cannot but see.

I HAVE done with the *Influence of good Company*; I am next to consider *that of bad*. This Subject, after what I have in general said, does not require long insisting on. Daily Experience is too plain, too sad a Proof of this Truth, That Sin is catching and infectious: That Human Nature is so prone to Evil, that it needs very little Temptation or Encouragement to it: That ill Principles and Practices are soon propagated; and, if they find any Countenance and Approbation from those we converse with, they will easily bear down all the Opposition which the Modesty of a civil Education, the weak Impressions of Reputation, or Decency, or the Checks of natural Reason, can raise against them. Nay, Holiness itself, unless well grown, and deeply rooted, can scarcely resist the Contagion which ill Company spreads. *Can a Man (saith Solomon) take Fire in his Bosom, and his Cloaths not be burnt?* Prov. vi. 27. And *evil Commuication (saith St Paul) corrupts good Manners,* 1 Cor. xv. But we shall be more sensible of the pernicious Effects

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Effects of ill Company, if we consider these two or three Things.

1. Sin is the Cement of the Friendships and Intimacies of Sinners ; Vice is the Subject of their Conversation, and some Sensuality or other makes up the Diversion and Entertainment of such Company. And how can it be otherwise? *Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth speaketh*, Matt. xii. 32. What can the Mouth utter but Sin and Folly, when the Heart is full of Wantonness, Lust, Pride, Envy, Ambition, Sottishness, or Vanity? What but polluted Streams can flow from a polluted Fountain? What but Evil can an evil Man bring forth out of the *evil Treasure of the Heart*? Matt. xii. 35. How hard is it then even for a good Man to maintain the Character and Dignity of his Mind, where Censures and Slanders, malicious Wit, or Trifling and Impertinence make up the Conversation? How hard is it, even for such a one, to preserve the Purity and Sobriety of his Mind ; where Riot and Luxury is the Business they meet about ; where Pride and Ostentation of Life is the only Thing admired ; and nothing has any Savour in it, that is wise or good, devout or humble? And, if a virtuous Person can in such Company scarce keep his Ground, how easily are those borne away by the Stream, who are of themselves but too prone to Evil, and too fond of Temptation?

2. Ill Company does naturally instil and propagate vicious Principles, worldly Maxims, sensual,

sensual, carnal Improvements: Here we are furnished with Objections against God and Providence, with Excuses and Apologies for Sin; here we learn to ridicule Religion and Conscience, and dispute ourselves out of all Sense and Duty. It is of this Sort of Communication St *Paul* speaks, when he saith, *That it corrupts good Manners.* And at this Day, those Errors which fret like a Canker, and consume every Thing that is wise and serious in us, have multiplied so beyond measure, that they are no longer the Enclosure of some few Pretenders to Freedom and Reason, but the foolishhest and meanest, as well as the most vicious Part of Mankind, are deeply tinged with them.

3. Ill Company creates Confidence in Sin; a Custom of talking unconcernedly and loosely does naturally make Way for Carelessness and Liberty in our Actions; and, if we repeat either often, we shall soon grow bold and stupid in Sin: For, if we neglect to make any Reflection upon our Words or Actions, we shall be insensibly betrayed into a Hardness of Heart; or, if (what is worse) we be driven, by the Reproaches of our Conscience upon Reflection, to take Sanctuary in the Cheats and Impostures, whether vulgar or more refined, which Sinners are wont to put upon themselves, we shall soon sink into Prophaneness and Atheism. Having thus unfolded to you the Truth of the first Proposition, and shewed you that Men become such as their Company; I am next to proceed to the

Second,

Second, "That Happiness is the Fruit of Wisdom, and Misery of Folly." Men may flatter themselves as they please, and delude themselves with vain Words; they may call the Proud and Rich happy; they may admire the prosperous Sinner, and, in a senseless Fit, applaud themselves in their vicious Pleasures; but they must bid Defiance, not only to Revelation, but even Reason and Experience too, ere they can promise themselves a true and lasting Satisfaction in any Thing but Virtue. Revelation tells us plainly, *that Godliness, and that only, has the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come, 1 Tim. iv. 1.* That, *if we sow to the Flesh, we shall of the Flesh reap Corruption; but, if through the Spirit we mortify the Deeds of the Body, we shall live, Gal. vi. 8.* That *we must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that we may receive according to what we have done in the Body, whether it be good or evil, 2 Cor. v. 10.* And both Reason and Experience, as well as Revelation, tell us, that Sin is fruitless and dishonourable: *Rom. vi. 21. What Fruit had ye then in those Things whereof you are now ashamed? That there is no Peace to the Wicked: That they are like a troubled Sea when it cannot rest, continually throwing up its own Mire and Dirt, Isa. lvii. 20.* That the Miseries and Calamities of Life spring from Sin: That Sin blasts our Enjoyments and Possessions; that it gives Sting and Edge to all our Miseries and Misfortunes: For, if we did not doat upon the Body and the World, the Evils of Life could not.

not wound us so deeply. In a word, Revelation, Reason, Experience assure us, that Righteousness fills the Mind with Peace and Joy; that Sin tortures it with Contradictions and unreasonable Passions, with the Guilt and the Terrors of the Lord; and what think we must be the Result of both in another World; *In the Day of the Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God?* Rom. viii. 5. Must the Nature of Things be altered, that the Sinner may be saved? Must Religion be an Imposture, that Madness and Folly may prove Wisdom? Must Reason be a mere Amusement, that Lust and Fancy may be infallible Guides? Must the Judgment of another World contradict all our Sense and Experience in this, that the little Raillery and Sophistry of the loose and vicious part of Mankind may prove the only Thing that has Solidity and Weight in it? These are Things too absurd and ridiculous to be fancied. I will enlarge no longer on a Truth which is controverted by none, except the Prophanes and Atheistical, but will on to the third Thing proposed.

Thirdly, To give you some Advice for your better Conduct, as to Society, or keeping Company. This may be reduced to three Heads:

1. We must be very cautious what Company we keep.
2. We must endeavour to make the best Use of it.
3. We

3. We must be fully persuaded, that the due Governments of ourself in this Point is a Matter of the highest Moment.

1st, As to the first Rule: We must reject the Authority of Scripture, if we refuse to observe it; for this expressly forbids us to associate ourselves with the Wicked and Vicious: Prov. iv. 14, 15. *Enter not into the Path of the Wicked, and go not into the Way of evil Men; avoid it, pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away.* 2 Thess. iii. 6. *Now we command you, Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every Brother that walks disorderly, and not after the Tradition which he received of us.* 1 Cor. v. 11. *But now I have written unto you, not to keep Company; If any Man that is called a Brother be a Fornicator, or Covetous, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, with such a one, no not to eat.* Nor do the Examples of Holy Men deviate in this Point from the Precepts and Exhortations of the Spirit. Psalm xxvi. 4, 5. *I have not sat with vain Persons, neither will I go in with Dissemblers. I have hated the Congregation of Evil-doers, and will not sit with the Wicked.* Psalm cxix. 63. *I am a Companion of all them that fear thee, and them that keep thy Precepts.* And thus it was with other good Men, they did equally covet good, and shun evil Company. Thus Mal. iii. 16. *When Wickedness abounded, then they that feared the Lord talked often one to another.* And in the first Times of Christianity, great
was

was the Intimacy and Dearness of the Disciples of *Jesus* one with another; great was their Abhorrence of all the Works of Darkness, and all Communion and Fellowship with those that practised them, as may easily be inferred from *Acts* ii. and iii. and other Places of Holy Writ. The Scripture then is plain in this Point: And, from what I have said, it appears that Reason is so too, unless we can think that Wisdom and Folly, Happiness and Misery, are Things indifferent.

But here it will be objected, At this Rate we shall soon find ourselves obliged to renounce the World, and quit all Company. Is not our Case much the same with that which *St Paul* puts *1 Cor. v. 9, 10*? *I wrote unto you in an Epistle, not to company with Fornicators; yet not altogether with the Fornicators of the World, or with the Covetous or Extortioners, or with Idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the World.* To this I answer, 1. Be it granted, as the Objection supposes, that we must keep ill Company or none, in this Case I affirm it is far better to keep none. Retirement is not so dreadful a Thing to a Christian, as some think; the Calm and Peace of the Mind is much more desirable than Noise and Laughter; and the Quiet and Regularity of Privacy much to be preferred before the Sensuality and Confusion of vicious Company. Nor need any one complain of the Uncomfortableness of Solitude, who can converse when he pleases with Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles; nay, with God and his Son *Jesus*. A good Man
may

may meet God, like *Isaac, in the Fields*, or *Moses in the Desert*; he may enjoy Communion with him, like *David, in his Bed-chamber*, or *Joseph in the Dungeon*. The Promise, *John xii. 23.* is not limited to place; *If a Man love me, he will keep my Words, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our Abode with him.* But, on the other Hand, in the Company of the Wicked we shall never find God, nor ever feel any Effects of his gracious Presence, but shall be exposed to the Attempts and Practices of Evil Spirits, and to the Contagion of Vice. The wise Man observes, that it is better to live alone, than with a Companion of a rough, untractable, and exasperating Temper: But I am sure there can be no Company, how froward and rough soever, so fatal to our Happiness, as that which instils Vanity under the Advantages and Opportunities of Friendship: No Solitude can be so dismal or uncomfortable as that Society which infects the Heart, or darkens the Understanding; no Provocation or Insolence can be half so injurious, as that Conversation which tends to Softness or Debauchery, to the betraying us into a Love of this World, and a Forgetfulness of God.

2. This Objection may have some Colour in a Pagan or a Jewish World, but sure it has none in a Christian one. The Church of Christ is not yet left like a Cottage in a Vineyard; our Jerusalem is not yet degenerated to the Degree of *Jerusalem* of old, when God spoke thus of it in the Prophet, *Jer. v. 1.* *Run ye through the Streets of Jerusalem, and see now*

now, and know, and seek in the broad Streets thereof, if you can find a Man, if there be any that executeth Judgment, that seeketh the Truth, &c. Nor need we yet pray with the Psalmist, *Psalm xii. 1. Help, O Lord, for the godly Man ceaseth, for the Faithful fail from among the Children of Men*: For the Servants of God are yet numerous; nor are they driven to their secret Chambers, or to the Wilderiness, or ashamed to own their Lord and Saviour, or to make an open Profession of the Hope that is in them.

I grant, will you say, that there are good Christians, but they are not easily, they are not every-where to be found; but the Worshipers of Pleasure do every-where swarm, every-where haunt us. There is an easy Remedy for this; Do thy Duty with an humble and unaffected Confidence, with a steady and unalterable Resolution: Put on the Garb of a Disciple; let the Air of a Christian appear in every Thing that thou doest, or sayest; let the Brightness and Beauty of Holiness, that enriches and adorns the Soul, break forth ever and anon in thy Conversation; and thou shalt soon see, that the Good will love thee, but the Wicked will forsake thee: They will shun thee, as Ghosts are said to do the Light of Day; or as Hypocrites and Profligates did the Society of the first Christians; and of the rest durst no Man join himself unto them, *Acts v. 13.* Thou dost too much accommodate thyself to the Modes and Humours of the World, and this draws upon thee the Company of the Impertinent and Vicious; it is an earthly

earthly vanishing Splendor, about which these Moths and Night-flies flutter: It is Jet, not Gold and Diamond, that is said to attract Straws.

3. But lastly, This Rule obliges us only as far as we can (the Nearness of Relation, or necessary Business, does sometimes make it our Duty to converse with those which we otherwise would decline; and, in this Case, all that can be expected is) not to have any Fellowship or Communion with them in their Vices, but to discountenance or reprove them. And, as the World goes now, I think this Rule is to be extended no farther than to Intimacies and Familiarities, to voluntary and chosen Acquaintance, not to accidental Meetings, or occasional Correspondencies. But we must take Care not to be too favourable and compliant in this Matter: The more Sin abounds, the less Discipline is or can be exercised, the more zealous should we be in particular to do Honour to Religion, and to fix a Mark of Shame and Infamy upon Vice. Never is this Rule more scandalously transgressed, than when Priests and Prelates court the Company and Favour of Atheists and Adulterers: Or Matrons and Virgins that of a wretched Woman, whose State and Port is not more notorious than the Shame and Lewdness that maintains it. How can our Wives or Daughters think that there is any Shame or Turpitude in the Sin, when we pay so much Respect to the Sinner?

2dly, We must consider what ought to be the true End and Design of Society and Conversation among Christians. Certainly that Man has a very mean and low Notion of Friendship, who proposes no other End than to eat and to drink together, or to laugh and fool away our precious Moments. The Scripture points out to us much nobler Purposes and Designs of Conversation, when it tells us, that our Speech should be such *as may administer Grace*; that we should *build up one another in our holy Faith*; that we should *comfort one another, exhort one another continually*, and so much the more, because *the Day approaches*, &c. and surely we are strangely mistaken, if we think that our Communication will lose all Gust, by being directed to one of these Ends. On the contrary, it would doubtless be as much more delightful as beneficial, if, when we meet, we were accustomed, instead of Censures and Reflections, News and Impertinence, or Frothiness and Lightness, to discourse of some worthy and noble Subject, becoming the Genius and Hope of a Christian. The Example of *David* confirms this Notion; he tried, and found, that Friendship was both useful and pleasant; whilst it was maintained on the Stock of Religion; *My Companion, my Guide, my Familiar Friend; we took sweet Counsel together, and walked unto the House of God in Company*, Psalm iv. 13, 14.

To this it will be again objected, It will be very difficult at all Times to find Matter
and

and Occasion for good Discourse. I answer,
 1. I do not utterly and totally exclude the
 common Accidents of Life, the Business and
 Affairs of it, nay, even Things of a pleasant
 and divertive Nature, if modest and inoffensive,
 from being sometimes the Subjects of Con-
 versation; but, I say, Religion ought to be
 the main and great End of it. 2. It is hard
 for me to conceive, how a good Christian
 should often want either Matter or Opportu-
 nity for pious Discourse. As for Matter, he
 must suffer the Providences of God to pass
 without any Observation or Remark; he must
 be a Stranger to the Works of Nature; he
 must be utterly unread in the History of Hu-
 man Affairs; he must be unacquainted with
 the Book of God; and he must have little
 Experience of the Power and Operation of
 God's Word and Spirit upon his own Soul;
 he must have reflected very little on the Wiles
 of Satan, the Temptations of the World, and
 the Defects and Weaknesses of Human Na-
 ture, who can want Matter for good Discourse.
 The Man of Letters, the Man of Business,
 the Man of Pleasure, never wants Matter;
 Books furnish the one, Business the other,
 and their Vices and Diversions the third. It
 is strange, that the Christian alone should be
 barren. The Christian! who is a Child of
 the Light, and of the Day, and should abound
 in Wisdom and Understanding. The Christian!
 who has every Hour Matters of the highest
 Importance on his Hands! And who, finally,
 is entertained with more and richer Pleasures,
 than the most fortunate *Epicurean* can pretend

to. As to Occasion or Opportunity of good Discourse, did the Heart run that Way, every Thing would afford it us. But alas! We rather shun than seek Occasions: And I know not by what strange Error we have banished all Matters of Religion out of Company; as if nothing but Ignorance or Affectation could make a Man so impertinent, as to talk of any Thing that were pious and good. I beseech you to consider, whether this be not a very near Approach to the being ashamed of Christ? And, if it be, how shall we escape that dreadful Sentence which is denounced against it? *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my Words, in this wicked and adulterous Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father with the holy Angels.* This minds me of the

3d, and last Direction, which is, That we must be thoroughly persuaded that the right Conduct of ourselves, in the Point of Society, is a Matter of the highest Moment and Importance. Does not the Scripture plainly suggest this, when our Saviour tells us, *Matt. xii. That by our Words we shall be justified, and by our Words we shall be condemned?* And St James tells us, *James iii. 2. If any Man offend not in Words, the same is a perfect Man.* And it is no Wonder the Scripture lays so great a Stress, or sets so great a Value on the due Government of the Tongue, since nothing tends more to the pleasing of God, to the Honour and Interest of Religion, and to the forming the
Morals

Morals of Men. As to this latter, the forming every Man's particular Manners, I have said enough: One Thing here I will only remark; never was there a more illustrious Proof of the Efficacy of Religious Conversation, than in the primitive Times. Next to that of the Spirit of God itself, the Christians found no greater Support under all their Trials, than what they derived from their mutual Encouragements and Exhortations of one another. And I do not question, but that Religious Friendship would be as useful now to preserve us against the Snares and Pleasures of Sin, as it was then to uphold them under their fiery Trials and Afflictions, were our Discourses now actuated by the same Spirit theirs were then. As to the pleasing God; must not God, think you, be as well pleased with our talking of, and magnifying his wondrous Works, in our familiar Conversations with one another, as with our praising or extolling him in our Closets? And must not the Regard and Reverence which we testify for him in Company, be as acceptable to him as our private Adorations? Spring they not from the same Principle? And is not the one as subservient (to say no more) to his Glory as the other? As to the Honour and Interest of Religion, nothing can more effectually promote it, than the giving a frequent and public Testimony of our Value for it. Which way can we more clearly convince the World of the Excellency and Virtue of it? Which Way can we more effectually propagate in one another the Love of it, than by making it appear that it has
molded

molded and formed our Souls into the Image of God; that it has possessed our Thoughts, and refined our Conversation? But, on the other Hand, if we have no Regard to our Talk, if we think this a Matter which Conscience is not concerned in, we shall soon see Religion daily lose Ground; for we shall soon learn to think and act with the same Liberty we talk; and this will introduce a strange Face of Things in a little Time.

Now to close all: If our Care or Unconcernment in this Point be of this vast Consequence, we cannot but think we shall be called to a strict Account about it in another World; the Day is coming when the Lord will fulfil his Promise, *Mal. iii. And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a Book of Remembrance was written: And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that Day when I make up my Jewels.* The Day is coming when God will execute the Threat denounced in the Apostle Jude, *Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his Saints, to execute Judgment upon all, to convince all that are ungodly amongst us of all their ungodly Deeds, which they have ungodlily committed, and of all their hard Speeches which ungodly Sinners have spoken against him.*

F I N I S.



